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I am here as a mother, a teacher, and a concerned citizen not only on behalf of my son Tristan, but for all who have dyslexia. Our story is but one among many. As you know, 20% of our population is known to have some degree of dyslexia. We have a desperate need to have dyslexia identified as early as possible so early intervention can occur. I have taught for almost 30 years, in the elementary and in secondary class rooms. I can tell you teachers want the knowledge to help their students, but we have not received nearly enough training to assist dyslexic students. I suspected that Tristan had some issues with reading prior to kindergarten, but at his kindergarten screening they insisted that he was ready for school. During his kindergarten year my concerns grew as I saw him struggle with his ABCs, rhyming and other pre-reading skills. I read to Tristan every day, so this was not a matter of neglect. His kindergarten teacher suggested that he had vision problems. I had him tested at the eye doctors, where they initially prescribed special glasses, then later determined that he had tracking problems. We pursued a year of vision training, not covered by insurance. I saw little to no growth despite hours of paid training and daily practice at home. With little progress being made, the public school began its laborious RtI process, which was not only ineffective, but it delayed the appropriate early intervention he needed. With the lack of progress being made, as an informed parent, I knew I needed to show up with a written letter requesting testing. The school psychologist told me there was no specific test offered for dyslexia. After the school tested him, they classified him with a learning disability, NOT dyslexia. Seeing little progress, I hired a private Wilson reading tutor (3x – 30 min. weekly) to supplement his daily special ed program. The program was not providing an evidence-based reading program for dyslexics.

I remember Tristan being devastated that he would be attending a Wilson reading summer school program through the district. None of his friends had to go to school over the summer. Going into second grade, he was reading at a kindergarten level, despite the extra tutoring, vision training and daily resource room. Third grade proved to be more of the same. This summer, we decided to have him privately tutored over the summer. Then I finally had him tested privately. I learned that not only was Tristan seriously dyslexic, but he is also a very smart boy with a very superior IQ. He fell under the category of gifted/dyslexic, which I have come to find out is not unusual. The testing done at school had not addressed his intelligence, and I had been lead to believe that I needed to accept that he would not “catch up” to his peers.

Empowered by my new found knowledge, I insisted that my son receive intensive one-on-one instruction, or I would hold the school responsible for his lack of progress. During fourth grade he was finally given the support he needed. But once they got him reading in fourth grade, they put him back into a group setting in fifth grade where he received group services at the end of the school day. He showed little growth during his 5th grade year. For a child who is intellectually aware and sensitive, he knew that his skills were not on par with his peers. He was frustrated seeing how easy many of his peers found school, his self-esteem began to suffer to the point that he did not even want to go to school anymore. He was suffering and his love of learning eroding. With the advice of a personal friend, who was the superintendent of special education in my district for over 30 years, we decided to send our son

to Kildonan, where the education is geared towards teaching the dyslexic mind, which has neurobiological differences.

If I was not tenacious and assertive, my child would have been much further delayed. Why did it take private testing, hours of mis-guided searching, and thousands upon thousands of dollars of our personal money to have my son's disability properly diagnosed and treated?

My son has me, but not all parents have my educational background, knowledge of the system or financial ability to help their children. As a society we are failing this population (20% of our children.) Our indifference to recognize their needs and intervene as early as possible is inexcusable. It may appear to be fiscally prudent to ignore the upfront needs of this population, but as a society we are subjecting these children to years of undue suffering. Dyslexics are frequently the creative thinkers, the problem solvers, but we create an environment where they feel they are failures. You cannot put a price tag on confidence. We are one of the wealthiest states in the union. We cannot claim ignorance, we have the information, we must act and we must act now.